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SUBJECT: MFA DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR ON IRAN, AFGHANISTAN,  
PAKISTAN

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador William J. Burns for reasons 1.  
4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a December 18 meeting, MFA Second Asia Department Director Maryasov reviewed the results of Iranian FM Mottaki's December 13-14 trip to Moscow, noting bilateral agreements on trade and cooperation, confirming the sale of 130 civilian aircraft was possible but premature, and reiterating that Russia was not interested in creating a gas cartel with Iran. Maryasov said FM Lavrov's meeting with Mottaki broke no new ground on Iran's nuclear program, and Lavrov told the Ambassador in a December 19 meeting that he pushed for Iran to suspend uranium enrichment and claim a "victory" with its securing of Bushehr's fuel (septel). Mottaki also discussed Iran's position on key regional issues, including Afghanistan, Iraq, MEPP, and Lebanon. Maryasov agreed to look into the case of Robert Levinson, an Amcit that is missing in Iran. On other issues, Maryasov outlined Russia's plans to increase its bilateral and multilateral assistance to Afghanistan, including by working with NATO, and expressed Russia's concern with the growing influence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. End summary.

FM Mottaki's Visit Yields Bilateral Dividends  
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¶2. (C) In a December 18 meeting, MFA Second Asia Department Director Aleksandr Maryasov characterized as productive Iranian FM Mottaki's December 13-14 visit for a meeting of the bilateral commission on trade and cooperation. He said that Mottaki and Rosatom Director Kiriyyenko, who heads the commission on the GOR side, signed a long-term memorandum of understanding on trade and cooperation and an agreement on tourism. In the next few months, another agreement would be signed on the mutual protection of economic investments.

¶3. (C) Maryasov added that the bilateral commission would also facilitate joint business projects in the fields of energy and transportation, including railway and aviation. He noted that a number of business contracts would likely be signed at the next commission meeting in 2008 in Tehran. Maryasov commented that "it is only natural" that Iran has shown increased interest in expanding economic ties with Russia, as Iran "has largely been cut off from European -- not to mention the U.S. -- markets." He stressed that the GOR did not intend to direct business deals to Iran (as Mottaki had sought) but the trade should be based on mutual interest and driven by market forces.

¶4. (C) When asked about press reports that Iran may purchase 130 civilian aircraft from Russia, Maryasov said the sale is still under review, although he noted that Russian companies are interested in completing such a deal. (Note: Mottaki visited the Tupolev plant in Kazan during his visit.) We noted that the U.S. would follow closely the possible transaction, given sanctions implications. Maryasov

underscored that the type of aircraft under discussion was strictly used for civilian purposes and reiterated that transactions would be in line with UN resolutions and international regimes.

15. (C) On Iranian press reports about the possible creation of a gas cartel similar to OPEC, Maryasov confirmed Iran's proposal but stressed that the Iranians were told flatly that Russia was not interested. Such a cartel would "dictate demands" to consumer countries, and Russia is in favor of "balanced relations" with gas suppliers and consumers.

#### Mottaki Regurgitates Official Position on Nuclear Program

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16. (C) Maryasov told us that Mottaki's separate meeting with FM Lavrov focused on Iran's nuclear program. Lavrov commended Iran for its continued cooperation with the IAEA and its intention to resolve the remaining three (out of six) issues raised in the IAEA plan, but emphasized the need to address outstanding UNSC concerns about uranium enrichment and other activities. In a December 19 lunch with the Ambassador, Lavrov confirmed that he encouraged Mottaki to take advantage of the "recent favorable conditions" -- particularly the GOR's December 16 initial delivery of nuclear fuel to the Bushehr plant -- to suspend its uranium enrichment and claim "victory" by having secured nuclear fuel and developed nuclear technology.

17. (C) Maryasov stressed that the GOR has been consistent in its message to Iranian leaders -- from Putin's and Lavrov's October trips to Tehran to Iranian nuclear negotiator Jalili's December visit to Moscow -- that Iran could preserve rhetorically its sovereign right to continue uranium

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enrichment, but needed to suspend enrichment immediately in order to address the outstanding concerns of the international community. However, Maryasov said that Mottaki gave Lavrov the "usual reply" that Iran should not be deprived of its right to develop nuclear energy and only agreed (again) to take Russia's suggestion under advisement.

#### Mottaki on International Issues

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18. (C) Mottaki also discussed with Lavrov a number of other regional issues.

-- Afghanistan: Mottaki said Iran was worried about President Karzai's conciliatory gestures toward some members of the Taliban, stressing that such a policy was "dangerous." Instead, Karzai should be ratcheting up the fight against Taliban forces. Mottaki urged Lavrov not to believe "those who are saying" Iran is conducting negotiations with the Taliban; "the Taliban is our enemy."

-- Iraq: Mottaki observed that terrorist activity had declined in Iraq and noted a "good level" of cooperation between Iran and the U.S. on Iraq, expressing readiness to continue its dialogue with the U.S. Mottaki added that Iran was committed to supporting the Maliki government in its efforts to achieve national reconciliation and political stability.

-- MEPP: Mottaki reiterated Iran's position that the Annapolis conference was not in the interest of Arab countries. Maryasov said Lavrov rejected this position, arguing that Annapolis represented one more step to the resolution of the existing problems in the region and highlighted Syria's participation in the conference as an illustration of the importance of the conference. Mottaki responded that Iran was very disappointed that Syria took part in the conference. Maryasov said Mottaki took on board Lavrov's request that Iran help moderate Hamas' "aggressive behavior."

-- Lebanon: Lavrov told Mottaki it "would be wise" if Iran encouraged all political forces in Lebanon, including Hezbollah, to reach a political consensus and agree on a compromise candidate for the position of president. Mottaki said Iran was already working in this direction, but stressed that the situation is very difficult.

#### Levinson Case

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¶9. (C) We reiterated our request for GOR assistance in obtaining the whereabouts of missing American citizen Robert Levinson, noting that thus far Iran has shown no interest in cooperating with the Swiss and the Levinson family. Maryasov undertook to look into the matter.

#### Russian Assistance to Afghanistan

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¶10. (C) Maryasov agreed that, despite tensions in other areas, Afghanistan represented one issue where there was strong potential for deeper Russian cooperation with the U.S. and NATO. Maryasov reviewed the possible channels through which Russia could funnel its increased assistance to Afghanistan.

-- Bilateral assistance: Russia is ready to provide increased military assistance to the Afghan National Army (ANA), but the details of this assistance would be discussed when the Afghan Defense Minister visits Moscow for talks. Maryasov noted that Afghanistan has yet to respond to Russia's invitation with a proposed date. Without going into details, Maryasov added that Russia was considering a resumption of its assistance that was suspended in 2006 (apparently because the Karzai government was not fully utilizing the assistance). Maryasov confirmed that Russian narcotics liaison officers are already working in Afghanistan and are providing Afghan drug officers training on counternarcotics work. He also confirmed that Russia is discussing with Afghanistan several investment projects, including the building of a thermal station and the reconstruction of the Solong tunnel.

-- NATO: Russia is interested in coordinating with NATO on the delivery of military equipment and goods through Russian and Central Asian territory to ISAF, noting that only some technical and legal issues had to be resolved. Maryasov added that Russia would also be willing to work with NATO to provide the ANA with high-quality Russian weaponry.

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-- CSTO: When asked about the possibility of Russia and NATO working together on counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan, Maryasov said the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was the preferred mechanism for Russia. He noted the involvement of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the CSTO's Operation Channel drug interdiction and eradication efforts last year.

-- SCO: Maryasov confirmed that Russia was also interested in increasing the activity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Afghanistan. Specifically, SCO was exploring the possibility of providing assistance in counter-terrorism, counternarcotics, and economic development. Maryasov told us that SCO would hold an international conference on Afghanistan, and participants would include SCO members and observers (including India and Iran), with major donors (including the U.S.) and other international organizations also invited. Maryasov said the SCO was still working on a date and location for the conference.

¶11. (C) Noting that almost all of the CSTO members are also members of SCO, we sought clarification on the delineation of

responsibilities between CSTO and SCO. Maryasov explained that SCO, which was created to help resolve border disputes among member states, was mainly devoted to political and economic development. CSTO, on the other hand, is essentially a political-military organization.

#### MFA on Domestic Politics in Afghanistan

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¶12. (C) Maryasov noted that Afghan political leaders are increasingly more focused on the upcoming national elections and commented that the relationship between Karzai and the United Front has become more complicated. Maryasov argued that the United Front was formed as a "constructive opposition," providing Karzai with reasonable proposals on creating more efficient state institutions and bringing different nationalities into the government to create a more balanced political system. The United Front leaders tell Russia that Karzai ignored these proposals. Maryasov said Russia has encouraged Karzai to reconsider some of the United Front suggestions, as the United Front leaders are only trying to strengthen (and not weaken) Karzai's governing capacity. Maryasov took aim at Karzai, noting that Russia has the impression that Karzai would rather work with moderate Taliban than with the United Front.

¶13. (C) Maryasov maintained that international efforts should be focused not only on increasing the capacity of the ANA, but on providing significantly more financial and logistical assistance to local governments. He attributed the Taliban's strong and growing presence in the provinces to weak local institutions (which receive virtually no support from the central government) and a dramatic change in Taliban strategy to win over local inhabitants and tribal leaders. The Taliban have adopted a more "mild and friendly" approach, and Maryasov told us that the Taliban has detailed this approach in a written code of conduct for Taliban members. The Taliban have also proven adept at promoting their "successes" in establishing order and stability in Taliban-controlled cities.

#### Pakistan

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¶13. (C) Maryasov noted Musharraf's recent positive steps to restore political stability to Pakistan, and said Russia was pleased that both opposition parties led by Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto would take part in the upcoming elections. Maryasov underscored that a "dangerous situation" was nonetheless developing in the country, pointing to the official establishment of a Taliban movement last week, with its stated goal of removing all foreign military forces from the country. Maryasov said that the Taliban is consolidating its forces "on both sides of the border (between Afghanistan and Pakistan)." Given the complicated domestic situation in Pakistan, Maryasov concluded that Musharraf had done reasonably well and warned against discounting the Pakistani President's contribution to fighting terrorists.

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